

BACKGROUND SUMMARY:
PROPOSED CALIFORNIA STATEWIDE REFERENCE DESIGN

Prepared for the California State Librarian

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This “Project Background Summary” is a companion to the several documents that have been created as this project has unfolded. They include the following:

- June 7, 2007 Narrative description of the proposed design, entitled “California Statewide Reference: Proposed Design Description” on the California State Library website:
<http://www.library.ca.gov/assets/acrobat/RefDesign.pdf>
- April 18, 2007 Slide presentation, entitled “California Statewide Reference: A Design Proposal” delivered at the Library of California (LOC) Board meeting, April 18, 2007. A slightly revised and updated version is on the State Library website:
<http://www.library.ca.gov/assets/acrobat/CARefDesign.pdf>
- The minutes of the Library of California Board meeting are slated to be approved at the next Board meeting and will be available on the California State Library’s website:
<http://www.library.ca.gov/loc/board/minutes/minutes.cfm>
- October 2006 “Developing a New Reference Model: Scope of Work” on the State Library’s website:
<http://www.library.ca.gov/assets/acrobat/NewRefModel.pdf>
- September 14, 2006 Presentation to the LOC Board: project purpose, scope of work, methodology. The minutes of the meeting are on the State Library’s website:
<http://www.library.ca.gov/loc/board/minutes/minutes.cfm>

Project Purpose and Scope

In the fall of 2006, State Librarian Susan Hildreth hired Ruth Metz Associates, Portland, Oregon, to develop a new design for statewide reference in California. The project specifications called for the consultant to take a direct and pragmatic approach to designing the new reference model. They further stipulated that the new model should include the following components, building wherever possible on the strengths of the current reference structures in California.

- A “next level of reference” for referring and answering questions that cannot be handled at the local public library. Presently, questions are referred from a local public library system to its regional reference center. The California Services Act (CLSA) enables state funding for reference services. In FY 2006/07, state

funding totaled \$1.3 million and local libraries contributed another \$300,000 for a total of \$1.6 million.

- Virtual reference, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week (24/7). AskNow is currently California's 24/7 service. This is available directly to the public as a link on the web pages of CA public libraries. The California State Library supports this service on behalf of California libraries with \$200,000 in federal Library Services and Construction Act (LSTA) funding.
- Selected specialized databases to support the question-answering function. The regional CLSA reference centers and AskNow librarians use the Los Angeles Public Library's *First Source* databases. The California State Library uses LSTA funding to provide this service: \$313,500 in FY 2006/07.

Project Timeline

The project timeline spanned August 2006 to June 2007. The consultant's work plan included four phases: start-up/preparation, fact-finding, design, and ramp-up to implementation. The project is currently in phase 4.

Project Methodology

The consultant studied documents and conducted field visits and interviews related to second level reference, virtual reference, and databases. She also interviewed various key informants regarding reference state of the art, best practices, and futures thinking.

Major Findings

- The three elements of the current "model", reference referral, virtual reference, and database support, are not working as effectively as anyone wants.
- People in the field understand that the current elements are not functioning well for Californians and they are expecting a change. They are open to a change that offers the promise of improved service and of helping libraries into the future generations of reference and Web services.
- Some say there needs to be a "next level" of reference service, even now as reference is changing. CLSA system key informants tend to believe that local libraries need their services because local staff is ill-equipped to go it alone. Some stakeholders, particularly in better funded libraries, believe that *traditional* reference is 'dead' and that 2nd level reference is not the best expenditure of CLSA reference funds.

- Many stakeholders are of the opinion that it is time to replace next level reference with funding subsidies and/or State Library leadership to enable Library 2.0 and beyond development.
- There's universal ambivalence about the viability of virtual reference, the nature of questions, and the technical problems that make virtual reference difficult to use. Many are dissatisfied with AskNow because of its software and online technical difficulties. AskNow depends on hours contributed by local libraries. There is no service oversight or coordination. A high percentage of questions are of a "call desk" nature. For example, they are location-specific or account-related. They generally have to be referred to the local library.
- Key informants believe that while virtual reference today is far from perfect, web-based services are inevitable, public libraries need to be in the game, and the State Library needs to lead the way.
- A significant amount of money is going into acquiring databases around California at the local, regional, and state levels. Libraries report that the use of databases is discouraging. The data shows scant use of First Source by CLSA systems and AskNow.
- There's no "leaderly" oversight of any of these elements at this crucial time of changing technology and next generation Web service evolution.

Major Conclusions

- Despite any current inadequacies, all three elements should be a part of *the next* statewide model.
- Any successful model is dependent on effective leadership for oversight, coordination, integration, analysis, and development.
- The organizational structure must enable the model to change quickly as needed, adapt to the changing technology, expand and contract, add and take away.
- A better model is possible within the structure of CLSA.
- CLSA funds may be repurposed to do this along with other funds. LSTA funding could supplement the developmental facet of the model along with grants and public/private funding partnerships.

Ramp-Up to Implementation

This project is now in its 4th phase: ramp-up to implementation. "Implementation Ramp-up" includes inviting CLSA stakeholder comments, establishing a client team of State

Library and CLSA representatives, and hiring a project manager. Subsequently, the project manager and client team will develop a project implementation plan and timetable. Figure 1 below summarizes the ramp-up activities leading up to the selection of a project manager.

Ramp-Up to Implementation	
Consultant prepares narrative description of the proposed design	State Library posts design narrative and related documents invites comments from public library community, especially suggestions, considerations for implementation maintains a Q&A supplementary to the design narrative Features the project in the State Librarian's quarterly web cast Monitors the library community channels and responds as needed
Consultant proposes project manager specifications and management budget including suggested funding sources	State Library hones proposed specifications Begins market search for interested, qualified candidates Convenes a client team of State Library and CLSA representatives Interviews candidates Selects project manager Develops project implementation plan and timeline with client team and project manager
Project manager plans and facilitates regional meetings for implementation kick-off	

This important and significant project in California has the potential to set the gold standard for library reference services. The willingness of California to lead the way in dealing with this universal challenge will have a lasting impact on California and on library development in general.